

F Fortnightly S Sermon

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CHICAGO, ILL.

VOLUME 2

NUMBER 2

AUTHORITY

CHICAGO

THIRD CHURCH PUBLISHING COMMITTEE, 917 WEST MONROE STREET
1890

Entered at the post-office at Chicago as second-class matter.

JUNE 15, 1890.

THE FORTNIGHTLY SERMON

(SECOND YEAR.)

Contains Mr. Blake's current discourses in the pulpit of the Third Unitarian Church of Chicago. It will be dated the 1st and 15th of each month, as heretofore; but the vacation months of July and August will be omitted this year.

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Price of the FORTNIGHTLY SERMON, 50 cents a year, postpaid. Single sermons 5 cents.

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AUTHORITY.

"Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right."—Luke xii, 57.

My subject this morning, namely, authority in religion, connects itself with some questions that often have been asked me, and very lately have been asked me again, concerning the relation of the Bible to our rational thought in religion. I am happy to take this topic because I wish, as much as possibly I can, to make the pulpit answer the current needs of those who are thinking in the direction of the pulpit's subjects; and surely no subject is more natural in the pulpit than the foundation of religion.

The authority of the Bible is the source whence are drawn the weapons in all the petty quarrels of the sects. I stand as much outside of them all, even of some of them that unhappily infect with their littleness our own Unitarian household, as if they existed not, because I cannot breathe in such an atmosphere. But I recognize the necessity of taking into account the source of all religion and asking what it is, and I see that the rightfulness of authority, as a principle, and the true nature and extent of authority, lie at the bottom of all these issues, and, too, of the issue between Romanist and Protestant. Therefore, I need no excuse, I think, for taking the subject this morning, even though I treat it a little technically.

Let us first gain a perfectly clear idea of the real question at issue. What is the true matter in dispute? What are the two standards or opposing views which are set forth and maintained?

The question is this: In religious or theological thought, are our natural faculties, by which I mean the rounded mind of each man, sufficient for our guidance, and all we have? Or need we also another source of knowledge, generally called a revelation, and have we such a source? On this question it seems to me clear that the two sides are exactly at issue. Furthermore, there is no room for a logical middle ground. Either our natural mental operations are enough to guide us in moral and religious truth, or not enough. Either we have a superior source of instruction to which we must bow, or we have no such source. There is no ground between. Accordingly, one side answers "No, our minds are not sufficient to themselves. They fall into error, or else they tell us not all the truth we need. We have an authority which rectifies the error and reveals the truth. The Bible is our authority, which subordinates our faculties because it is a revelation from the Most High." The other side answers, "Our minds, it is true, are finite, limited, but still they are sufficient to themselves. They lead us into error (or, rather, I like better to say, they wander into error, since our minds are ourselves) but, also, they find their way to truth. We win the victory, rectify our own mistakes and increase our sum of truth. This is all that is needful. The universe lives on patience. God is not in haste. Man is saved and unfolded by effort rather than by results. In the processes of growth our minds not only are sufficient but supreme. No authority can overpower us. No revelation can override reason. There is, and there can be, no authority over the mind, since the mind is only another name for our power to apprehend and comprehend the truth."

Now, the perfectly clear issue which these two answers make has been needlessly confused by vague notions of the meaning of authority. It is asked, How is it possible to reject all authority? Can each man know everything for himself? Must we not take many things about which we know little on the authority of those who know more of them? Do we not guide our lives every day by chemical, mechanical, astronomical, medical facts, which we take altogether on the authority of the masters in those branches? This question always is asked triumphantly, as if it settled the matter and established authority for-

ever. I simply answer to it, No, indeed. We accept not any of our knowledge, or of the principles on which we order our daily lives, on the mere authority or dictum of any man or men. Our acceptance and belief is just as much an act of judgment as if we had examined the matter thoroughly for ourselves; only instead of weighing the evidence we weigh the mind and character of those who have weighed the evidence. I cannot do better than quote on this point the language of Archbishop Whately, who certainly would not have missed so important an argument for authority in religion as the one in question, if it had been sound.

“It is manifest,” he says,* “that the concurrent testimony of several witnesses, where there can have been no concert, and especially where there is any rivalry or hostility between them, carries with it a weight independent of that which may belong to each of them considered separately. For though, in such a case each of the witnesses should be even considered as wholly undeserving of credit, still the chances might be incalculable against their all agreeing in the same falsehood. It is from this kind of testimony that the generality of mankind believe in the motions of the earth and of the heavenly bodies, etc. Their belief is not the result of their own observation and calculations, nor yet again of their implicit reliance on the skill and good faith of any one or more astronomers; but it rests on the agreement of many independent and rival astronomers, who want neither the ability nor the will to detect and expose each other’s errors. It is on similar grounds that all men believe in the existence and in the genuineness of ancient books, such as the Scriptures. It is not that they have themselves examined these, nor again, as some represent, that they rely implicitly on the good faith of those who profess to have done so; but they rely on the concurrent and uncontradicted testimony of all who have made or who might make the examination, both unbelievers and believers of various hostile sects, any one of whom would be sure to seize any opportunity to expose the forgeries or errors of his opponents.”

Now, this is exceedingly plain and unanswerable. It is manifest that we take not our common knowledge implicitly on authority. Our belief is the result of a simple and common

*Whately’s Rhetoric; quoted with some omissions for brevity.

sense act of judgment, so simple as even to escape observation unless we carefully note our mental processes. But very far different from this is the authority which is asserted in religion. *That* is not merely the effect of circumstances. It springs from our nature. It is not merely the resort and aid of a voluntary ignorance, but professes to make up for inevitable incapacity of nature. It addresses not itself to reason ; it supplies the place of reason and puts the mind under its feet. It can not be escaped by thought or study. No man can prepare himself by any effort, to judge for himself on the subjects of which it treats. It rules alike over the ignorant and the learned, and the function of the mind is only to repeat its discourse. De Maistre, the great disciple of absolutism, confesses the foundation of authority in religion when he says, "Man in general, if left to himself, is too wicked to be free." Religious authority means the absolute rule of a revelation, held to be supernatural, over the incapable human mind. I take from Farrar's Bampton lectures of 1862, at Oxford, the following plain, just and resolute expression of the meaning of Christian authority : "Christianity," he says, "asserts authority over religious belief in virtue of being a supernatural communication from God, and claims the right to control human thought in virtue of possessing sacred books, which are at once the record and the instrument of this communication, written by men endowed with supernatural inspiration. The inspiration of the writers is transferred to the books, the matter of which, so far as it forms the subject of the revelation, is received as true because divine, not merely regarded as divine because perceived to be true."

I repeat that this is a perfectly clear issue, and no one does service to the truth who beclouds and confuses this issue by foolish association of it with the views and doctrines of scientific authority.

Now I need not say to you that I accept no such authority. I admit no rule of any kind over my reason. I consider no claim so sacred as that of each man's reason on his moral allegiance. No duty is so plain and imperative as the duty of using one's own mind and being true to it.

Let me give a good illustration. In the time of Luther several of his contemporaries engaged in turbulent conduct, and de-

fended it from the Old Testament. This called forth from the great reformer a treatise entitled "Instruction on the manner in which Moses is to be read." "Moses," says Luther in that treatise, "was a mediator and law giver to the Jews alone, to whom he gave the law. If I take Moses in one commandment I must take the whole of Moses. Moses is dead. His dispensation is at an end. He has no longer any relation to us. When any one brings forward Moses and his precepts and would oblige you to observe them, answer him thus: Go to the Jews with your Moses. I am no Jew. * * *

If now the disorganizers say, Moses has commanded it, do you let Moses go and say, I ask not what Moses has commanded." Bold language about Moses in that day and generation, but very honest, clear and sound. In like manner, when any one cites against my reason, some sayings or deeds of Jesus, whom they call Christ, as for example that he believed in possession by demons, in the existence of the devil, in everlasting punishment, or that his recorded words teach such things in the sacred texts, what shall I say? If I speak like Luther I shall say, "Go, friend, take this written word of Christ to the dogmatic Christians. He is their authority. He is not my authority. I have no authority. I believe not in special Christian revelation, but I believe in the universal revelation. Therefore I will not hedge myself in with any society or any name, either Christian or any other."

But, you ask me, does not Christ teach the truth, and do you not receive one who teaches the truth? And so Luther imagined his opponents replying to him, "Moses has commanded that we should believe in God, that we should not take his name in vain, that we should honor our father and mother, etc. Must we not keep these commandments? Answer them thus," continues Luther, "Nature has given these commandments, nature teaches man to call on God, and hence it is natural to honor God, not to steal, not to bear false witness, etc. Thus I keep the commandments which Moses has given, not because he enjoined them but because nature implanted them in me." In these courageous words from the sixteenth century I should answer my Christian brother. I keep the commandments which Jesus has given not because he has enjoined them but because nature

implanted them in me. Jesus authorizes not the truth but the truth authorizes Jesus and glorifies him until he shines unto my eyes in my reverence, because of his faithfulness to his own soul.

I know well the charge of self-sufficiency and pride which are brought against such a position. But is there no self-sufficiency and pride when ignorance first calls itself "Faith" and then despises the researches of learning and criticism? A familiar passage in Frances Newman's "Phases of Faith" will illustrate the pride of authority and prejudice. He says, "While we were at Aleppo, I one day got into religious discourse with a Mohammedan carpenter, which left on me a lasting impression. Among other matters, I was peculiarly desirous of disabusing him of the current notion of his people, that our Gospels are spurious narratives of late date. I found great difficulty of expression; but the man listened to me with much attention, and I was encouraged to exert myself. He waited patiently till I had done, and then spoke to the following effect:—'I will tell you, Sir, how the case stands. God has given to you English a great many good gifts. You make fine ships and sharp pen-knives, and good cloth and cottons, and you have rich nobles and brave soldiers; and you write and print many learned books (dictionaries and grammars); all this is of God. But there is one thing that God has withheld from you, and has revealed to us; and that is, the knowledge of the true religion, by which one may be saved.' When he thus ignored my argument (which was probably quite unintelligible to him), and delivered his simple protest, I was silenced, and at the same time amused. But the more I thought it over, the more instruction I saw in the case. His position towards me was exactly that of a humble Christian towards an unbelieving philosopher; nay, that of the early Apostles or Jewish prophets towards the proud, cultivated, wordly-wise, and powerful heathen. This not only showed the vanity of any argument to him, except one purely addressed to his moral and spiritual faculties; but it also indicated to me that ignorance has its spiritual self-sufficiency as well as erudition; and that if there is a Pride of Reason, so is there a Pride of Unreason."

Now let me look at some logical aspects of authority.

By consideration of the nature of our mental processes, I think we shall see that authority is a simple and logical impossibility. Our faculties, which mean simply the operation of our minds, must be either sufficient or insufficient for our mental and moral development. If sufficient, there is an end of the matter, because then no authority is needful. Moreover, if our faculties be sufficient, they must be competent to decide for themselves; whereupon authority is an impossibility. For it is contradiction to affirm that faculties are at once both sufficient and obliged to hang on authorily. If our faculties be insufficient, it is because they are either false or limited. If false, then we are landed in complete uncertainty concerning all things, and the rightfulness, worth and substance of authority are as uncertain as other things. If the mind be false, how can we be sure that it is truthful in this very idea, that it *is* false, and why true in this if false in other things? What security can there be that false faculties understand the authority, and follow it well, or follow a true and correct authority? In this case, then, authority is impossible, because all knowledge and all means of knowledge are impossible. False faculties will be as unable to interpret a revelation, as to find the truth for themselves. Nay, no reason can be imagined why they even should know it to be a revelation, for then they would be so far truthful and not false.

If, on the other hand, our faculties be true and trustworthy, so far as they go, but very limited, then it is not certain that they are insufficient for our proper development, even though they cannot lead us to all truth, because our needs may be limited in the same proportion. It is hard to resist the conclusion that our minds give us all we need to know. For everywhere in nature we find powers and needs well balanced. But that our minds give us all we *need* to know appears the more plain from this, that they give us all we *can* know. For how can we acquire what we have no means of allying with ourselves? To say that we have a faculty of any kind, is only to say that we are able to comprehend a certain kind of knowledge; and to say that we can know anything for which we have no faculty, is to say that we can know what we cannot know. Hence it happens that no authority anywhere ever has conferred on man-

kind a truth about the soul, its religious natures or powers, which has not dawned elsewhere, before the authority, or without it. The only value and office of authority in these great truths of religion is confirmatory. There is never anything original in the dictates of a religious authority, except the nature and claims of that authority itself. Christianity, for example, has its theology, its ethics, its anthropology, and also its Christism; but only its Christism, that is, its system of claims and doctrine concerning the authority of Christ, is original. The rest it shares with all mankind. There is no religion that does not team with the same thoughts, no corner of the earth but is glorified with them. And in its formal or historical originality, as well as in its contents affirmatory of great common truths, Christianity is limited and ruled by our powers of reason and perception. It cannot transcend our faculties, and remain intelligible. If authority overstep once the bounds of our perception or comparison, it becomes instantly unintelligible, because then it treats of an order of things of which we have no conception; as a man born blind cannot receive a notion of color from any declarations, howsoever he may take them implicitly. And if authority go contrary to reason, then again it is unintelligible, because it transgresses the limits which to our minds bounds the possible. On either score, therefore, authority is simply impossible, as a means of truth in religion.

Again, authority is either entire, and requires us to accept without question the whole contents of the revelation or record, or else it is partial and requires assent only to parts of the contents of the record. If the record be only partially authoritative, as many persons declare the Bible to be, then we are left to determine the authoritative parts from the other contents. But to examine the contents and judge of authority from the matter, is to rest the authority on the merits of its teaching; that is, on reason. But this does away with authority altogether. If the record be absolutely and entirely authoritative, then we are thrown back on our own powers at last, by the necessity of interpretation. We have an entire and perfect rest and quiet shelter, as soon as we find the *meaning* of the true authority; but we seem to be left to ourselves to get at the meaning. We

need not trouble ourselves about the *truth* of the substance; but how find out *what* the substance is? For this momentous task we have only our own powers, unassisted, after all. What kind of agreement men have found in interpreting the Bible, the history of the Church and of the different sects discloses. The Bible is plain enough, it is often said; anybody may know it; he who runs may read it. Nothing can exceed the ignorance or blindness of such an assertion. "The Bible plain! Why, the awful doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, and the atonement, have *all* been vehemently denied on the authority of the Bible! Roman Catholics confidently quote the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, against Protestant doctrines. Cardinal Bellarjune quoted more than fifty texts in proof of purgatory, and others quote more than a hundred in defence of their confidence in the blessed Virgin. Is anything more plain to the Papist than the declaration to Peter, Upon *this* rock I will build my church? Is anything less ambiguous to him than the words, 'This *is* my body?'"

From a valuable Review* I take another illustration, furnished by a debate between a Methodist and a Universalist on the dogma of everlasting perdition. By the Universalist clergyman "every prominent text in the Bible that proved his doctrine was brought forward and used to the best possible advantage, while the arguments of his opponent were criticized and ventilated in a most able and ingenious manner, forcing doubt upon the minds of hundreds who thought they had not doubted before. On the other hand, the Methodist clergyman fortified his position by such an array of Scriptural testimony as made the very temple of Universalism tremble visibly in the consciousness of those who based their hopes of its truth in the testimony of sacred writers, and they were fain to flee for refuge to the firm pillars of reason. Nothing was more obvious to the thinking unprejudiced mind than that the antagonistic dogmas of universal salvation and eternal damnation can both be sustained by the Bible, and with about equal weight of testimony."

Truly when we view these facts, it seems not that our boasted authority avails much in securing us against our erring minds

*The Radical, Sept., 1867, p. 35.

after all. And when we remember the difficulties that time and the changes of language constantly are adding to interpretation, it is very plain that the duty of unfolding the meaning leaves us as much at the mercy of our own powers, as if we were obliged to think out the subject for ourselves; and with this immense disadvantage, that we use not the mind freely, and that it is directed on trivial and perplexing details instead of coping manfully and spiritually with the important matter itself.

There is but one way open to authority to elude this difficulty and fulfill its boast of guarding the human mind from error. That way is suggested in a sentence of De Maistre. "All the centuries," he says, "have cited the Bible it is true, for any thing can be found in any book which any man has a right to interpret for himself." This is the inevitable result. The infallible book must have an infallible interpreter. The written authority must have a living authority to expound it. The authoratative oracle of the past must have an authoratative interpreter in the present. There must be an actual, moving, living authority, to whom the difficulties of the written one can be referred as they occur. And this is Roman Catholicism. It adds to the past authority of the Bible the living authority, equally infallible, of the interpreting church.

To the logical excellence of this position no one, I think, can fail to do honor. And who that observes the signs of the times can be blind to the strength and fervor which simple, logical consistency gives to the Romanist. The world is dividing itself, I think, between Rationalism and Romanism. Said that remarkable observer, De Tocqueville, confidently, "America will, sooner or later, lie prostrate, the easy captive of Rome, because regulars always beat the militia." I think not so; but if not so, it is not Protestant sectaries that will save us, but men who, founding on their own spiritual natures, take their stand with simple, rational, natural religion.

Now I cordially respect the consistent Romanist, and I as much—I like not to use a contemptuous word—disapprove of the dallying, staggering Christian sects which drag themselves awkwardly on unequal crutches and think to unite liberty and authority. I think I maintain a logical position because I renounce all external bondage and trust only to my own reason

and spiritual nature. The Romanist, too, is reasonable, because he seeks to renounce all liberty. That great church tries no impossible unions. Authority is perfect, living, final, triumphant. Freedom is utterly discredited and abhorred. Rome stands still strong and powerful, not less in its consistency than in its mighty organization. It is the crowning wonder of the centuries. Its past is magnificent and its present true to its past. It has made many empires and outlived many more. Its ample cloisters stand silent and full of rest, and over them brood guardian spirits of saint and martyr. Its walls are old and grey and vine-grown. Its moss-covered eaves distill musical drops of reverend antiquity. It is here with us, shorn somewhat but scarcely impaired, or, perhaps, like Antaeus, the stronger for the falls which have taught it to understand better the civilization of the hour. Like the mighty oak, that shakes from its summer leaves the same drops which moistened it a hundred years ago, that church stands green and hale. It bids fair to flourish when all the little, cowering Protestant sects that now attack it, that shrink from bondage but dare not be free, that try to tie authority with reason and lose both, sink into forgotten graves.

But if the Papist and the simple thinker who disowns all authority are the two logical extremes, there must be some defect in the Roman position, which makes it the untrue extreme. That defect, I think, is this, that the Romanist finally escapes not dependence on reason any better than the Protestant. The church gains perfect quiet, it is true, in its own bosom, because it is a living authority which can define itself, and silence when it cannot convince. But the Papist does not escape trusting his own powers; for if he believe in the Bible according to the command of the church, he must have some reason for believing in the church and in its right to command. He will not admit the discussion of a dogma, because church authority has settled it; but he will admit the discussion of church authority, or, if not this, at least he will admit the discussion of discussion of church authority. Somewhere we must arrive at a common ground where we each repose on reason, because no man is willing to believe any thing which he thinks it unreasonable to believe. Thus the church of Rome really gets rid of reason not at all. It puts reason practically out of sight, but it can not logically destroy reason. The

Papist still depends at last on his own powers, and he cannot substitute authority for reasoning because of the very nature of reason.

If any one admit the argument thus far, it will appear plain that in last analysis religious authority is an impossible pretence.

I turn now, though it must be briefly, even hurriedly, to some practical aspects of authority in religion.

Authority, though logically such a shallow pretence, is practically of much influence among men. The reason is that men think little, and are content to follow some one without question. I was once reprimanded by a good woman for reading the Greek Testament. Her father and grandfather, she said, read the English Testament, which was good enough for anybody. This abeyance of individual thought is ingeniously used by Locke to prove that there is not so much error in the world after all: "Not," he says, "that I think men embrace the truth; but indeed, because concerning those doctrines they keep such a stir about, they have no thought, no opinion at all. * * * They are resolved to stick to a party, that education or interest has engaged them in; and there, like the common soldiers of an army, show their courage and warmth, as their leaders direct, without even examining, or so much as knowing, the cause they contend for. * * * Thus men become possessed of, and combatants for, those opinions they were never convinced of, nor proselytes to; no, nor even had so much as floating in their heads; and though one cannot say there are fewer improbable, or erroneous, opinions in the world, than there are; yet this is certain, there are fewer that actually assent to them and mistake them for truths than is imagined."

Now, first among practical considerations, I ask, Of what effect or use in the mind are doctrines or opinions taken thus on authority? Of no use, unless to lull to sleep. They confer no noble enthusiasm. They create no clearness of thought. They furnish no food for reflection. They make the mind inert, supine. It matters little in these effects, whether the opinions be true or false; taken implicitly, on authority, they are also taken indefinitely, half understood or not understood. They cannot stir and awake the mind to thought and earnest-

ness till first they be assimilated, made the mind's own property by its own efforts and recognition.

Again, authority, supposing the opinions true, endangers the truth, because the mind, ignorant of the foundation of its opinions, is left defenceless before the most delusive sophistry. Authority makes "it nearly impossible for the received opinion to be rejected wisely and considerately, though it may still be rejected rashly and ignorantly; for to shut out discussion entirely is seldom possible, and when it once gets in, beliefs not grounded on conviction are apt to give way before the slightest semblance of an argument. Waiving however this possibility, assuming that the true opinion abides in the mind, but abides as a prejudice, a belief independent of, and proof against, argument,—this is not the way in which truth ought to be held by a rational being. This is not knowing the truth. Truth thus held, is but one superstition the more, accidentally clinging to the words which enunciate a truth."* "He certainly that has searched after truth, though he has not found it, in some points has paid a more acceptable obedience to the will of his Maker than he that has not searched at all, but professes to have found the truth when he has neither searched nor found it; for he that takes up the opinions of any church in the lump, without examining them, has truly neither searched after nor found truth, but has only found those that he thinks have found truth, and so receives what they say with an implicit faith, and so pays them the homage that is due only to God."†

To the claim of authority in religion I oppose the conception of thought as a duty. Is it not plain that it is everyone's duty to think, reason, search, "*prove* all things and hold fast that which is good?" To prove is not to accept blindly another's proving or take another's decision, but to *prove the thing*, to gaze at the object for ourselves. And to hold fast there is no way but by proving. One may hold, that is, contain, by mere reception; but to hold *fast*, which is to say, to close the hand on and grasp, one must prove. Can one shuffle from himself and lay on another the responsibility of living? If not, then is not every man's answerableness to live, the greater and more binding as we come to the higher regions of life? If every man be

*Mill on Liberty.

†Locke.

answerable for work that he may feed and clothe his own body, is he not bound still more to think for himself, reason, examine, prove, love, pray, worship, for himself, that his soul may be clothed in the garments of the soul, which are earnestness, conviction, steadfastness, truthfulness?

Will it be said that the lower objects, to feed and clothe the body, and such like, are to be done easily, and safely may be trusted to human reasoning and laboring; but the higher objects, faith, hope, religion, are not easy and plain, but "mysteries" and "hard sayings," not safely to be trusted to man's reason nor to be seen by the light of his mind? But I answer first, Why not *safely*? Because man may err? But can a man fall out of the world by wandering? No more can he fall from religion by erring, if he err only in his result but fail not in the reverence, earnestness and faithfulness of seeking. For *it is the seeking* which is safety, salvation, God's presence with us. To *accept* a faith from some one's command or instruction is to make truth like coin or goods that may be put into one's hand by another's hand; but to *believe with the heart*, that is to know truth as spiritual wealth, and is great joy and freedom, not to be had till first the truth is proved by the mind.

And I answer, again, as to the higher and lower objects, that it is the high objects which most a man should seek and prove *with the whole man*. If one may give proof, examination, reasoning, to the concerns of the body, much more to the things of the spirit. If one surely will go astray and come to naught who follows his business just as another may point him, using not his own caution, much more will he come to no vastness of faith, no spiritual riches, no joy of heart-belief, who does away with himself in religious things, and takes commands, councils creeds.

But again, spiritual authority might not be so bad as it is, if always it founded on an adequate and true sanctity. But when we reflect on the effect of time to obscure historical credentials, making their study difficult and arduous; when we observe the ceaseless changes of religious opinion, in spite of authority, it is plain that authority always, in time, means merely usage. In different ages, the same authority supports opposite doctrines, and custom determines the authorized opinion

of the hour. In many of the old churches of this country the Bible was never read on Sunday. It cost years of agitation to carry that innovation! "In days gone by, Sunday appears to have been a popular day for marriages; although, as Mr. Jeaffreys, in his amusing history of 'Brides and Bridals,' remarks: 'A fashionable wedding, celebrated on the Lord's Day in London, or any part of England, would now-a-days be denounced by religious people of all Christian parties as an outrageous exhibition of impiety. But in our feudal times, and long after the Reformation, Sunday was, of all days of the week, the favorite one for marriages. Long after the theatres had been closed on Sundays, the day of rest was the chief day for weddings with Londoners of every social class.''"*

For more than 1500 years it was not questioned that the Bible declared the reality of witchcraft in the clearest manner. Accordingly the dire superstition was believed everywhere. Yet who now holds this opinion? This change is merely the different usage of different times and peoples. "The doctrine of salvation in the church was held by all the Lutherans and Reformed, and by the sects which separated from them, as well as by the Romish and other churches. Luther teaches that remission of sins and sanctification are only obtained in it; and Calvin says, 'Beyond the bosom of the church no remission of sins is to be hoped for, nor any salvation.' The Saxon Confession, presented to the Synod of Trent, A. D. 1551, the Helvetic Confession, the Belgic, the Scottish, all avow that salvation is only to be had in the church. The Presbyterian divines assembled at Westminster, A. D. 1647, in their 'Humble Advice concerning a Confession of Faith,' declare that 'the visible Church, which is also Catholic and universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the Law) consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.' The Independents admitted the same. Nor was the position of the Anglican church at all different. The Athanasian Creed was given an honored place among her formularies, and the doctrine which that creed distinctly asserts was implied in several of the services of the Church, and was strongly maintained by a long succession of her divines. Among

*Thiselton's "Domestic Folk-Lore."

the leading Reformers, Zuinglius, and Zuinglius alone, openly and unequivocally repudiated it. In a Confession of Faith which he wrote just before his death, and which marks an important epoch in the history of the human mind, he described in magnificent language that future assembly of all the saintly, the heroic, the faithful, and the virtuous, when Abel and Enoch, Noah and Abram, Isaac and Jacob, will mingle with Socrates, Aristides, and Antigonus, with Numa and Camillus, Hercules and Theseus, the Scipios and the Catos, and when every upright and holy man who has ever lived will be present with his God. In our age, when the doctrine of exclusive salvation seldom excites more than a smile, such language appears but natural; but when it was first written it excited on all sides amazement and indignation. Luther on reading it said he despaired of the salvation of Zuinglius. Bossuet quotes the passage as a climax to his charges against the Swiss Reformer, and quotes it as if it required no comment, but was in itself sufficient to hand down its author to the contempt and indignation of posterity.”*

From such historical facts, we see how futile spiritual authority is as a practical guide. It is not less worthless or harmful practically, than it is logically absurd and impossible to thought. We have no really sacred authority, and cannot have, owing to the changes incident to the lapse of time. Slowly and imperceptibly doctrines and opinions change. The views of different ages succeed each other by slight gradations. Only the watchful see the change when it is going on, and only the studious discover it soon afterward. There is nothing stationary; there can not be. God has not made the world so. Whoever anchors his mind to authority only becomes the slave of custom, the bondman of temporary usage. But the spirit of a man is too great and sacred thus to be enchained.

This, then, in sum, is my count against authority in religion:

1. If our minds be sufficient to themselves, authority is both needless and impossible.
2. If our faculties be false, authority is impossible, because all conclusion is worthless.
3. If our faculties be limited, authority must either deliver within their sphere, and then is needless, or beyond their sphere, and then is unintelligible.

*Lecky, History of Rationalism.

4. If we have a written authority, we must add to it an authoritative interpretation, otherwise the authority is rendered futile by private interpretation of it.

5. Views held merely on authority have no ennobling effect on mind and character. Also they are held ignorantly, liable to overthrow by specious argument.

6. Thought is a duty; and the higher the subjects involved, the greater is the obligation of every man to reason for himself.

7. Authority, owing to inevitable progress in knowledge and reason, is really no more than the custom or currency of the hour.

8. The mind of man is too great and august thus to be despoiled of its rights of reason and its dignity of judgment.

“I look over the list of mighty men who have been the schoolmasters of the race,” says Theodore Parker, “I see how they are forgotten and passed by other schoolmasters, and I wonder at the spiritual riches of man, which can afford to lose whole generations of philosophers, poets, mighty men, and never feel the loss. I wonder at the institutions of mankind, the laws, the organizations of church and state. But I see that the spirit of man is greater than all these, that it can pull them all down and build greater yet, that man’s nature is more than his history. So I reverence the past, its great institutions and great men, but I reverence the nature of man far more than these and put more trust in that than in all the achievements of man, all the institutions, all the great men of history, who are but as the watercresses and wind-flowers and violets, which come out in a single spring day, whilst our human nature is the great earth itself, whose bosom bears them all and prepares for a whole spring-time of fairer flowers, a whole summer and autumn of richer herbage and abundant fruit.”

“What new order of men,” exclaims Quintet, “are these? Galileo, Kepler, Newton, to whom it is given to read in the eternal council of the God of worlds? Let us here give them their real name,—they are the prophets of the modern world. We must not think that the spirit of God spoke only to the prophets of the ancient law, and that since Jeremiah and Ezekiel he has never spoken to any one. Those men of the old covenant saw

beforehand the law which moves the revolution of human societies. But, by this standard, are not Galileo, Kepler and Newton also seers? They read in immensity the laws which move the societies of worlds. Where did they perceive those laws, that sacred glory contemporaneous with God and co-eternal with God, if it be not in God himself? The least of them all, Linnaeus, after having recognized the laws of life in the infinitely little, exclaimed, 'I have just seen the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient God pass behind, and I remained silent with awe.'"